

No-mint-mark dimes are on the loose again

By Roger Boye

Once again, Uncle Sam apparently has issued Roosevelt dimes without mint marks, this time in 1983-dated proof sets.

Judging from reports in the hobby press, at least a dozen collectors so far have received sets containing the blooper coins. Proof dimes are supposed to sport an "S" above the date to identify the San Francisco Assay Office, their place of birth.

The United States Mint first accepted orders for 1983 proof sets May 2 and began shipping the coins to buyers a few weeks later. Collectors receiving sets with the potentially rare dimes live in all parts of the country.

One of those lucky hobbyists showed his keepsake recently to Tommy Ryan of Ryan's Rare Coins & Stamps in the Randhurst Shopping Center, Mt. Prospect. Ryan said that after examining the dime under 40-power magnification, he became convinced the coin was a genuine mint error.

"I suggested that the man keep his set to see what happens [to the market price]," Ryan said on July 7. "I haven't seen him since, and he didn't leave his name."

Several hobby pros, including Ryan, believe that mint workers created the error by failing to punch a mint mark into just one of the dozens of dies used to make 1983 proof dimes. The staff committed a similar error last year on a die used to produce 1982 dimes for circulation at the Philadelphia Mint.

To date collectors have found 5,000 or more of the 1982 error dimes. Those coins in uncirculated condition retail for at least \$250.

Unlike their 1982 cousins, the latest goofs won't turn up in change. Mint staffers place all proof coins in plastic cases and sell them to collectors [this year the government charged \$11 per set of five coins, cent through half dollar].

The new error dimes could become quite valuable if collectors discover only a few additional specimens. Already some dealers say they'll pay at least \$500 for 1983 proof sets containing the no-mint-mark dime, but the price could drop if thousands more turn up as the production and mailing of sets continue.

Uncle Sam has made three similar mistakes on proof coins in recent years. Prices range from \$7,000 or more for a 1968 set to \$1,000 for a 1970 set, each with no-mint-mark dimes.

Bureaucrats will produce approximately 3 million proof sets this year. "Normal" sets retail for less than \$20.